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Essay

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Menstruation

by

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In unison with those who have written on this subject, I shall define the menses to be a discharge of a coloured fluid, occurring every twenty eighth day or Lunar month, from the Pubescent state unto the forty-fifth or fiftieth year; unless interrupted by pregnancy, its consequences, or disease. As there is no longer any contention relative to the organ from whence it is derived, yet a variety of opinions exist, whether it comes from the veins, the arteries, or a peculiar set of vessels adapted to that purpose, and further whether it be a secretion or blood.

Why those persons are disposed to receive Dr. William Hunter's and Morgagni's opinion only in part on this subject, I cannot imagine, for it appears to me that if they allow those Gentlemen to be correct in the one case, they must in the other; Dr. Hunter's character for veracity is unimpeached, for acuteness of

observation not surpassed, and He says this secretion, was distinctly seen by him, percolating through the contorted extremities of the vessels of the Uterus, in a case of procidentia; now it is well known that the arteries alone have this appearance, it must therefore be allowed to come from the arteries, and as a consequence, if it comes from the arteries it must be a secretion, for all the secretions throughout the body are performed after this manner by the arteries, with the single exception of the Liver, and even the veins which execute this office are considered by some enlightened physiologists, to be of a decided arterial character.

As it is of little moment, who first suggested the menses being a secretion, I shall pass it over without further notice and adduce such arguments as my judgement may direct, in support of the opinion I entertain on this subject.

Does the appearance of this fluid offer no proof of its being a secretion? if so why does it not possess the common properties of the mass of blood as it circulates in the general system,? that it is defi=cient in some of these is admitted by all however induced and consequently if wanting in these constituents it cannot be blood although elim=inated from it.

What are the physical properties of this fluid, and what bearing will they have on the present question; First its colour is intermediate to that of venous and arterial blood. Secondly its never separating into the elemen=tal parts of blood however long exposed to the atmosphere. Thirdly its not coagulating even when kept for years. And fourthly its not taking on the putrefactive process as has been proved by cases of imperforate Hymen.

It has been stated in the definition of this secretion,

that it is in the first place elaborated at pu-berty, or in other words that it is the proximate effect of this state, for whatever may be said to the contrary, no woman has ever been fruit-ful without menstruating, although it may have ben somewhat modified in appearance and colour.

The time when this fluid is first elaborated is in a great degree controlled by climate, constitution, &c. varying from the ninth to the twentieth year as it may be the lot of the female to inhabit the frigid northern or the more genial southern cli-mate; Sooner in cities where relaxing luxury dwells, than in the rural cot of reason's tem-perate joys.

The evolution which at this time takes place is peculiarly interesting to the philanthro-pist, and philosopher, who accustomed to admire, and scan nature's works, beholds how admirably

She adds her mite to the general fund of
attire and, suddenly the appearance of the
female undergoes a change which is better un-
derstood than can, happily be explained; she
looks like unto a new being, fresh from the hands
of a "heavenly Sculptor"! with her voice more mel-
odious full and in fact her whole contour
expressive of womanhood, so far as the individ-
dual may be susceptible of that state.

Whilst these mutations in the corporeal
system are going on the mind is not station-
ary, the amusements of the boyden are now
thrown aside, and reason assumes her empire.

The other signs indicating the approach
of this interesting period are heat, fulness
of the eyes, pains in the pelvic region, listless
ness, whimsical appetite, slight leucorrhoea,
exciting sensation in the mammae, which
may continue for an indefinite period,

subsequently a discharge takes [illegible] place from [illegible] [illegible], and the colour of which is not necessarily red, or between that of venous and arterial blood.

The continuation of this discharge is (generally speaking) from four to six days, and recurs with great regularity every twenty eighth day, from the time of their [illegible].

While the flow lasts the appearance is languid, pale, or flushed, with a disagreeable dragging sensation about the hips and lumbar region.

After this manner are the other part of the creation subject to this discharge, until the fortieth, or fiftieth year, when it becomes irregular as to time and quantity, and finally ceases to return no more.

The cause of this secretion, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] yet as great "I am" has said, so far shalt thou come no further," to dive into his inscrutable ways

is impossible, that worldly man not content with beholding effects, without a knowledge of their causes, has framed a variety of opinions to account for, that the knowledge of which would avail him naught.

I will take a cursory view of some of those causes which have been thought all sufficient to induce this discharge; the first that arrests my attention is that of Lunar influence; the effect which this changing luminary has upon the tides, first attracted the attention of the Author of this hypothesis, which has no other basis than the periodicity which this secretion observes, to attend to the winds this reasoning, it is but necessary to state that which the most ignorant are acquainted with, which is that women are menstruating, on every day, and hour, throughout the year.

The doctrine of general plethora has much greater claims to our consideration.

although this hypothesis is much more plausible than the one just mentioned. I hope to prove it to be, what in my belief it is, the baseless fabrick of a vision, with no other support than that which it derives from the inventive genius of its author.

For argument we will for a moment admit what has been so roundly asserted by this theorist that women are more disposed to plethora than men, what tendency will this have? how will this substantiate what he so anxiously wishes? is plethora necessarily removed by hemorrhage, or is it not more frequently relieved by evacuation? the secretions, the latter opinion is maintained to be carried on, I think, if it is not why do we so often witness almost total exemption from this plethoric state, without the loss of a single drop of blood, by the morbid increase in some of their secretory functions.

Moreover, would not the great plethora of all

things have committed a work of supererogation in making her so, I think it, yet this he never does, every thing is in responsive harmony thing to its adaptation is a peculiar kind, from the simple functions of the zoophyte, up to the most complex man.

Again, if this plethoric state is the cause of this function, and is constantly present, why does not menstruation prevent this discharge? — as in epistaxis and other haemorrhages; on the contrary, it is well known that depletion carried to a proper extent, is in many instances absolutely necessary, as a preventive of it in suppression &c.

If I may be permitted to theorize I am willing to allow there may be more blood in the system of women during gestation than in the absence of that state, and think I can give some reasons as strong as the one brought forward by the Author of this doctrine.

in proof of it's existence, I do positively deny it's necessity either prior or subsequent to this period.

It is palpable to every one, that women are of a more full habit of body during the period of pregnancy, than at any other, consequently must have a greater quantity of fluids circulating in their systems; Now if there is an increase of the contained fluid there must be an increase in the caliber of the containing vessels, consequently, if this increase occurs there must be a dilatation in the coats of them vessels, which, owing to their elasticity, admit of it without detriment to a certain degree, the necessity of this increased quantity, ceasing to obtain, the vessels contract to their former size. So much may possibly be correct, I do not pretend to say that it positively is, we at least know it to be the case so far as relates to the uterine vessels, or how is this increase of blood contained in this organ without the

proportionable augmentation of these reflets in volume.

The final cause so far as human agency may be concerned in this arcanum of Nature (being absolutely requisite to the reproduction of the species as has been proved) may be hidden from our ken for some wise purpose whatever this may be I shall not attempt to develope, but shall merely state my opinion, by a few analogies, and comparisons, which I hope may not be thought misplaced.

When hunger exists the salivary glands are stimulated to action, or in other words to pour out the saliva, even by the expectation of food, to what is this owing if not to the sympathies reciprocally existing, between the brain, stomach and these glands? When food is taken into the stomach it is stimulated (or whatever name you may choose to give it) into action, and what-

phenomena have you, the pouring-out of the gastric juice mucus &c. what are these fluids? they certainly are not blood, neither is the stomach a gland, yet no one can deny it a secretory power, these are its physiological functions.

I might go on with such analogies with the liver, the kidneys, and in fact with every viscus it would hold good with all, what does this go to prove but that each organ has its peculiar stimulus to the impression of which it is susceptible in the exact proportion to the development of the organ in question. The application of this reasoning is obvious, the evolution of the uterus takes place like that of other organs, consequently is susceptible of the full impression of its natural stimulus this acting is productive of menstruation.—

Yet where am I! where has my subject borne me! far far beyond my depth or rather into a labirinth I cannot retrace and through which I dare not proceed!